

Jews and Revolutions

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The following are freely translated excerpts from Prof. Jacob Talmon's essay originally entitled "Jews and Revolutions," which was published in an Israeli newspaper. It is reprinted here from the *Other-stand*, a Jewish-Zionist-Communist paper published in Montreal.

THE ROLE OF THE JEWS in the Bolshevik revolution and in the Soviet regime is a frightening topic which still awaits its historian. In this essay we dare to make some general and marginal comments.

During the early days of the Soviet Union it was natural to pair Lenin and Trotsky as the initiators of the revolution. As far as determination and authority there was of course only one initiator—Lenin. Without his extremely effective and firm decisiveness which activated his hesitating friends, "October" would not have occurred. Yet with regard to actual execution and efficacious action nobody could equal Trotsky. To substantiate this claim one need only enumerate some of his accomplishments.

In 1917 when Trotsky returned to his previous job (the one he held in 1905) as the chairman of the Petrograd Soviet, only now as the leader of the Bolshevik majority, he created the "Military Committee" the body that actually started the "October" revolution. He played a decisive role in convincing the suspicious and unfriendly soldiers of the Petropavlosk Garrison, whose support was so crucial, to join the Bolshevik camp. He slapped the face of the Mensheviks and the Social revolutionaries with a deadly insult telling them: "You will be thrown into history's garbage dump where you belong." The entire

world held its breath during his struggle debate with German ministers and generals in Brest-Litovsk (Brest-Litovsk was the place where the Soviets negotiated with the Germans in order to terminate hostilities after the revolution), on the true meaning of self-determination. On behalf of what he claimed to be the "general wish" of the revolution, Trotsky confronted with an extreme centralist approach the trade unions who wanted to realize the principle of workers ownership of each and every factory. He not only organized the Red Army but he also fortified it with officers and technicians, many of whom were ex-Czarists.

Many Roles in the Revolution

It is inadequate to restrict the discussion on the role that Jews played in the Bolshevik revolution to leaders of the first rank. No less important was their role in the "Kaders," in the administration, the party, the economy and the technical services. This is particularly important in a situation where the administration of the previous regime was unwilling to cooperate, or was not trusted by the Bolsheviks.

The contribution of the Jews to the maintenance of the new regime in a country shaken by war from the outside, civil war inside, and widespread starvation, was immense. Lenin emphasized the revolutionary courage of the Jews. The Russians, he claimed, lacked the basic qualities of the real revolutionary, namely the enthusiastic devotion to a doctrine, which is so characteristic of Jews. One must also note that many Jews served the regime not as a result of deep convictions to Bolshevik ideals, but either they had no alternative but to join the revolutionary forces, when

the counter-revolutionary forces initiated a policy of anti-semitic pogroms.

The importance and influence of the Jews who participated in the revolution can be easily demonstrated. Yet it is interesting to note certain aspects that were characteristic of the Jewish revolutionaries. Although one can focus on the mercilessness and unscrupulousness of Trotsky as a pragmatist and opportunist, the cruelty of the Che-Kaman Oritsky, the inspiring propagandizing of Voldarsky (the latter two were murdered later), still closer scrutiny will reveal that most of the Jewish Bolsheviks, Jewish Mensheviks and the Social-revolutionaries, were people that respected lawfulness or at least were more inhibited in attempts to break it than their gentile colleagues, particularly Lenin.

Known are the steps taken by Kamenev and Zinoviev to maintain some lawfulness and legality in an otherwise chaotic country and above all not to act without the cooperation of the other workers' parties. This activity was exposed by Lenin as sabotage and betrayal.

Sabotage and Betrayal

While Lenin demonstrated complete disregard towards any kind of a legal system, perceiving the party, if not himself, as the criterion for right or wrong and thus the only legitimate interpreters of revolutionary lawfulness, it was Trotsky who suggested the assignment of formal responsibility for the revolution to the Petersburg Soviet.

The most typical characteristic of the Jewish revolutionaries in 1917, was undoubtedly their internationalism. While many gentile Bolsheviks maintained that the basic need for a revolution in the West was to strengthen and guarantee the success of the revolution (a typically Nationalist approach), Jewish revolutionaries like Trotsky, Radek, Zinoviev and others felt most deeply that the Russian revolution was *only* a local edition of the world revolution. It is neither

an accident nor simply the result of language facility that so many Jews (Radek, Vlarisa, Reizner) were active in the Comintern, and in international Communist conferences. Except for the token presence of a good-looking Russian worker girl and a bearded peasant, practically all the Soviet representatives at the Brest-Litovsk negotiations with the Germans, were Jewish. This fact did not escape the Germans, particularly General Hoffman who, two years later, demolished the Jewish-led Communist regime in Bavaria.

Suspicion of the Jews

It can be said that from the moment the gigantic struggle between Lenin and Trotsky was decided in favor of socialism in one country, i.e. a more nationalistic turn, the first step was taken in a process that revived suspicion of the Jews in the eyes of the Russian masses and the renewal of the special status of the Jews. (The internationalist Jew was considered a potential danger). But before these processes were culminated, the threatening figure of the Bolshevik Jew, the representative of an international world conspiracy was carved into the world's consciousness.

The Bolshevik revolution presented its neighbors, both those who were defeated and those who had just won their independence with a gigantic question: To join the revolution under Russian wings, or to fight for their own historical identity? When the representative of the old ruling classes, the Prince Max von Badden, the last premier of Imperial Germany, transferred the seal of office to the ex-innkeeper Evert, he asked him: "Do the Social Democrats see themselves as agents of a world revolution that began a year ago by the Bolsheviks or do they see themselves responsible for German national history and national heritage, as well as for the reconstruction of the devastated homeland?" Evert's answer to the Prince, that he saw himself responsible to Germany

because he himself had lost two sons in the war, is of fundamental importance. As soon as the decision was made in favor of a nationalistic trend (and there was never a doubt that this trend would be adopted), the future of the internationalistic Jewish revolutionaries was highly predictable. To the nationalist, the internationalist is a traitor.

Revolution in Bavaria

Nothing served more the racist and anti-semitic counter-revolutionary myth about the Jewish tendency to stab in the back, than the revolution in Catholic Bavaria by Kurt Eisner, and the high status of Jews like Yogics, Levin, Levinass, George Landauer and Yoffe in the shortlived communist government in Bavaria after Kurt Eisner's assassination. In Germany, which was devastated by defeat, unemployment and hunger, the central role that Jews played in the Weimar Republic reinforced that myth.

The Jew Hugo Peres wrote the Weimar Constitution. Walter Rathau was the first foreign minister to sign an agreement with Bolshevik Russia, and Kurt Eisner publicized secret documents of the German Foreign Ministry to prove that Germany had initiated the war so as to show the West that Germany repented and thereby to obtain more bearable terms for settlement.

The fierce and belligerent investigation of Field Marshal Hindenburg by Cohen, the advisor of the Reichstag committee which was established to investigate German military behavior during the war, gave rise to the popular slogan "Cohen against Hindenburg." In vain was the claim that in the battlefield Jews were first rate patriots; they were "anti-national" and when Hitler appeared on the political scene there hardly was anyone left to protect them.

The clash between Universalism and nationalism took a much larger form in Eastern Europe, the the most important example being Poland. The liberation

in Poland took top priority in the European revolutionary camp and was a basic principle in Marx and Engels' teaching.

The Polish were the oldest freedom fighters in Europe so that the establishment of an independent Poland meant nothing less than a deadly blow to the Czarist Regime. In spite of all this Rosa Luxemburg, a Jew and a leader of the Polish Internationalist Socialist Party, never stopped repeating the principle that with the growth of a widespread revolutionary movement in Russia it would be the sacred duty of Polish workers to unite with their Russian comrades and not to waste their time on nationalistic revision which would only serve to build a capitalist Poland.

In short there was no Polish national interest, there was only the class interest. Poland as a political entity was only an abstract term.

The group led by Rosa Luxemburg of which many leaders were Jews, became the nucleus of the Polish Communist Party after 1918. Some of its leaders made their way to Moscow. This is no surprise since Soviet Russia had declared itself to have no imperialist tendencies but rather to have the duty of bringing a revolutionary victory to every place on the globe.

Jewish Revolutionaries are Internationalists

The background of Jewish Internationalism can be traced to specific historical circumstances. After World War I the Jews had found themselves overnight not to be citizens of multi-national monarchies or participants in the great world cultures of Germany and Russia, but rather a minority group subservient to the Poles, Lithuanians, Slovaks, Roumanians, and Hungarians whose social and cultural development were centuries behind the ones they had respected. Most of the Jews did not know the new national languages and were reluctant to learn them. Many among the

Jewish youth that were now treated as strangers and as threats to free national expression, reacted by enthusiastically responding to universal revolutionary message. Of course, when the day of judgment came after two decades, the Roumanians, Slovaks and Hungarians let the differences among them fade away and became voluntary allies of anti-semitism and anti-Bolshevism. Lithuanian hoodlums as well as Ukrainians and Bielo-Russians were used by the Nazis in the dirty job of clearing the Jewish ghettos of their occupants.

The Bolshevik Revolution was used by Hitler as conclusive proof of the revolutionary role that Jews played in the world from their earliest history to the present. Recently our attention was drawn to a pamphlet which was published in 1924 which includes a series of discussions between Hitler and his teacher, Dietrich Ekart. The discussion is titled: "Bolshevism from Moses to Lenin, discussions between Hitler and myself." In contradiction to the view of revolutionaries that the "natural order" is corrupted by exploiters and capitalist, these two counter-revolutionaries saw the natural order of the well-defined pure races corrupted by the Jews.

Revolutionary Tendency of Jews

The exile of the Jews from Egypt, Christianity and the Reformation were all viewed as manifestations of this revolutionary tendency of the Jews against the "National Order." Ekart defined the Bolshevik Revolution as the "ritualistic massacre of Christians by the dictatorship of the World Jewish Redemption of Lenin and his Elijah, Trotsky-Bronstein.

"No nation in the world, not even that of Attila's murderers would have let him (the Jew) stay alive if it could suddenly see him as he really was."

The Hitlerite counter-revolution takes then the form of a universal revolution of superior races against the

epitome of evil on whom one can pin any social oppression and any social revolution.

Before self-destruction in the Berlin bunker, Hitler maintained that the world owed him a debt of gratitude for cleansing Germany and central Europe of Jews.

At the end of World War II, Jewish survivors across Europe awaited the Soviet Army as a liberator. The Nazi-Soviet pact was forgotten. The fact that Russia had resorted to arms only after the Nazis invaded her and not to defend Jews or oppressed nations, was totally disregarded. The world reached a stage where not-killing Jews was considered an immense altruistic feat. But there were other reasons for the pro-Soviet feelings. World War II had exposed the true character of the insane racist nationalisms, precisely in the same way as the great depression convinced many non-Marxists that Capitalism was bankrupt.

Defense Against Hitler

The ruling classes in most of East Europe were exposed by the war as being unable and unwilling to defend their countries against Hitler. In countries such as Poland or Hungary, the time for social revolution was ripe. It is not surprising then, that the Jewish survivors hurried to participate in a new beginning, in building socialism in countries that for centuries saw only oppression and exploitation.

On the objective level, the extermination of six million Jews meant that a whole middle class had disappeared, making the struggle for communism and the social ownership of resources that much easier. Many veteran Jewish communists who spent most of their lives in prisons, saw in the imposed communism despite its unpleasant overtones, the realization of their greatest dreams.

When the advancing Soviet army started to push back the Nazi invaders,

the Soviets enlisted the support of the Jewish survivors who were to be the most trustworthy executors of their policies in the Russian controlled areas. The local intelligentsia could not overcome their nationalistic resentment of the Russians, but as far as the Jews were concerned, their background pushed them in the direction of cooperation with the Russians. Once again the Jews' internationalism—in this case Moscow - orientated communism — clashed with the nationalistic aspirations of the local populations.

Removed from High Positions

As a result, Anna Pouker in Roumania, Rakoshi and his friends in Hungary, Berman and Hilary Mintz in Poland, and Slansky in Czechoslovakia became identified, in the public eye, with Stalinism and the feeling of contempt towards the latter finally resulted in the removal of those Jews from high-ranking positions.

When the leaders of the "Polish October" became the "establishment" and thus sensitive to criticism and non-conformity, the Jews, even those who had supported the Polish nationalist spirit, were labelled rootless cosmopolitans, sophists lacking backbones and, finally, part of the American, Zionist, Imperialist plot against the peace-loving socialist countries. They were described as having a corrupting influence on the simple people, the loyal, healthy people who have complete trust in the regime.

Common to all of the above mentioned situations of Jewish universalism vs. nationalistic aspirations is a denouement not unlike that of Shakespearian tragedy, with the scene full of corpses. Trotsky's skull gets smashed by the axe of a Stalinist agent. Rosa Luxemburg's mutilated body is dragged out of a river. Eisner and Landauer are killed by a bullet in the back. Zinoviev, Kaminev and so many others are hanged in the middle of the night in secret

prison cells. Slansky is executed as a traitor. The Poukers and the Bermans die in a focus of hatred, while the few survivors who do live are not only fired from their jobs but suffer constant harassment and contempt.

Motivation for Revolution

It is not oppression nor insult that motivates today's young middle class Jews to rebel and to become such illustrious revolutionists as the Pavel Litvinovs and Ginsburgs of Russia, the Ginsburgs and Rudds of America, the Cohn-Bendits of Europe, and, needless to mention, veterans like Herbert Marcuse loaded with fifty years of disasters and ironies.

It seems that they are all propelled by the same guilt feelings that attacked the Russian intelligentsia of the nineteenth century. As offsprings of countless generations of injustice, they feel discomfort, sorrow and guilt because of the luxury in which they are living, while so much hypocrisy and wickedness surround them. They feel it just a "bit more" than their gentile friends because of the unconquered spirit of non-conformity and restless soul-searching which stems at least partially from lack of solid Jewish roots and because of lack of a basis in a living Jewish experience. Due to the latter factors the Jewish rebels turn with overflowing self-hatred against their own people after having absorbed the criteria of the negators of Judaism. Also, their anger is sharpened because they never were able to resolve the meaning of their being Jewish either in a positive or a negative way.

They rebel against this Jewishness on the basis of criteria that can never be accomplished, they attack it in jovial cruelty because of its misdeeds and in that way they take revenge on their parents who preached revolutionary values but after a while preferred the good life that our rotten society supplies.